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ABSTRACT

The instructional concept guide is part of a system developed for tutor training and support. It is primarily designed for volunteers, but it can also be adapted to the training of paraprofessional tutors for any type of adult literacy program. A key component in the system is the Tutor Support Library, consisting of Instructional Concept Guides (training and reference aids for tutors) and Functional Content Units (models for the practical application of tutoring skills). Guide Eight instructs the tutor in the use of the language experience approach to teaching reading. This teaching method, based on the use of words from the student's own speaking vocabulary for his reading instruction, is described. A 14-step basic outline of the procedure is presented. A sample lesson plan showing how language experience is combined with other lesson activities is included. The guide contains a sample story dictated by a student and the followup lesson plan based on that story and the previous lesson's log notes. Suggestions are given for tutor preparation for an experience lesson and for other applications of the language experience method. A four-item reference list on the approach concludes the guide. (Author/MS)

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RALSU

TUTOR SUPPORT LIBRARY

Instructional Concept Guide No. 8

THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

Application for Tutoring Adults in Reading

by

Joyce D. Johnston
Susan G. Strader
Robert A. Palmatier

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Regional Adult Literacy Service Unit

A Right to Read Community Based Project

309 Aderhold Building
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia
30602

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FOREWORD

The ability to read has been taken for granted in the United States for as long as most of us can remember. Unfortunately the "us" in the previous statement refers to those in the population who are indeed able to read --- for example, those of you reading this message. Adult readers make up an exclusive fraternity and seldom find themselves involved with non-readers. But in this century the tempo and technology of American life have increased dramatically. And more and more we see that a significant proportion of our citizens do not have the reading ability society requires.

In the 1970's, the Community Based Division of the Right to Read Effort addressed itself to overcoming what is rapidly becoming a crisis in the area of adult literacy. A common bond for many of the projects supported by this division of Right to Read is the use of volunteer tutors to teach the older, out-of-school individual who needs reading help. It has been generally found that, while the desire to tutor may be "born," the ability to tutor needs to be "made." Consequently the cry has gone out, "We have the volunteers but we do not have a system for training them to tutor."

RALSU, the Regional Adult Literacy Service Unit, a Right to Read Community Based project, has therefore accepted as its major responsibility the development of a tutor training and support

system. It is primarily designed for volunteers, but it can also be adapted to the training of para-professional tutors for any type of adult literacy program. The complete system includes tutor training, a support system for the working tutor, and evaluation strategies for both programs and tutors.

A key component in the system is the TUTOR SUPPORT LIBRARY. This consists of two series of units entitled Instructional Concept Guides and Functional Content Units. The Concept Guides orient and train beginning tutors and serve thereafter as reference aids for the on-the-job tutor. The Functional Content Units are designed as models for the practical application of the teaching skills gained in the tutor training. For convenience, all Guides and Units are separately bound.

The Instructional Concept Guide that follows this "Foreword" is one of the following:

1. Getting Together: Establishing a Working Tutorial Relationship
2. Teaching One-to-One: A Diagnostic Approach to Beginning Tutoring
3. Student-Centered Tutoring: Using Initial Lesson Results to Set Future Goals
4. Help: Inside and Outside the Tutoring Agency
5. Process and Product: A Guide for Assessment of Community Tutoring Programs
6. Word Concepts: An Adult Approach to Decoding Skills
7. The Teaching of Sight Words: Ways and Means
8. The Language Experience Approach: Application for Tutoring Adults in Reading

9. The Directed Reading Approach: A Lesson Organization Procedure Adapted for Use with Adults

10. The Newspaper: A Source of High-Interest Instructional Material for Adults

11. Resources: A Guide for Using Published Materials in Adult Literacy Programs

12. Splitting Up: Terminating a Tutoring Relationship

Guide 1 is an orientation to tutoring; Guides 2 and 3 lead the tutor through the first sessions with a student. Except for Guides 1, 2, and 3, however, the booklets need not necessarily be presented in consecutive order. Guides 6 through 10, for example, explain in detail teaching procedures that can be used to teach the lessons described in Guides 2 and 3. Other Guides, as their titles imply, deal with supplemental helps for the tutor and with program assessment.

Hopefully, these materials as a whole will satisfy a long felt need expressed by many persons involved in the management of adult literacy programs. It is also hoped that the flexibility of format will make the publications adaptable to individualizing requirements within programs.

THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

Application for Tutoring Adults in Reading

Reading instruction for adults, if it is to be successful, must meet two equally important criteria: the interests of the individual student and the reading skill needs of the individual student. The close relationship developed through tutoring sessions provides a suitable setting for achieving both.

To meet student learning needs through tutoring, it is especially important to keep the atmosphere informal yet efficient at the same time. It is not always easy to maintain an efficient, businesslike attitude without lapsing into the formally traditional teacher/student relationship. Using less formal, highly student-centered teaching methods will help avoid these pitfalls.

A method which can often meet adult instructional needs is the "Language Experience Approach." It is an especially good choice for one-to-one tutoring since it is a technique that involves "sharing" between tutor and student. Thus it contributes more to the over-all relationship than methods that are more teacher-directed. Another point in favor of this approach is that you, the non-professional volunteer, can learn to use it with only limited training.

The language experience method is based on the use of words from the student's own speaking vocabulary for his reading instruction. It differs from many methods for learning to read which emphasize instead those words that are most frequently used in printed material (commonly called "high frequency words"). The philosophy and procedure of the language experience approach can be combined and expressed in the following fundamental statements:

WHAT A PERSON THINKS CAN BE SPOKEN.
WHAT IS SPOKEN CAN BE WRITTEN DOWN.
WHAT IS WRITTEN CAN BE READ.

Essentially, then, this is a process in which a tutor helps his student become an "author" and then, in turn, helps him to learn to read what he has "written." To begin the procedure, you would discuss the idea of writing a story with your student. Specific suggestions (or a special stimulus that can be seen, such as pictures) may be needed at first to get your student to produce enough words to write down. As time goes on, however, students usually come to sessions with ideas they wish to communicate to you through their "stories." (For non-readers and writers, you will serve as secretary, writing down their statements for them. More able students will soon be writing their own stories.) The student's written statements then become the reading content on which the lesson is based.

The language experience approach for teaching reading has become a widely-used method, including use in school programs, because of its versatility. This feature is exactly what makes it so useful in a tutorial program. Not only can the method be adapted to any age level,

it also requires no materials except paper and pencil. In addition, for older non- and poor readers, this method:

1) establishes tutor-student rapport quickly,
2) illustrates immediately the relationship between oral and written language,
3) provides instructional materials with meaningful content for the individual student, and
4) improves a student's attitude, motivation, and appreciation of himself by helping him be successful quickly.

Also, since the adult student is dictating the story himself, you avoid the problem of story content being too childish for him. Another strength of the language experience approach is that it teaches reading along with other related language areas: listening, speaking, and writing. A student is encouraged to express his thoughts through all three media.

Although the process appears simple, it will require a reasonable amount of preparation as well as practice in action to make it work smoothly. After the story is written, your student must first learn to read what he has "authored." This can usually be done with a few practice readings. Next, he must learn to recognize (not only within his story, but in other printed material as well) each of the words used in the story. To learn the words successfully, practice may need to be continued into lessons following the one in which the story was originally prepared. As the lessons progress, you will need to decide what skills your student needs to learn or practice --- what caused him trouble in writing and reading his story. You then plan activities that will help him overcome those difficulties. In this way the

the experience method allows you to more effectively meet the skill needs of your individual student. In most published reading materials, an established sequence of skill development is preplanned, requiring the teacher to fit the material to the student. In the experience approach, on the other hand, it is the student who comes first.

Teaching a Language Experience Lesson

Below is a step-by-step description of the basic method for using language experience. A sample lesson plan showing how language experience is combined with other lesson activities is included. You will also find an actual "story" dictated by a literacy student together with the follow-up lesson plan based on that story and the previous lesson's log notes (i.e., the lesson in which the story was dictated).

Basic Outline of the Language Experience Method

1) Suggest ideas for the experience story if necessary. You might offer magazine or newspaper photographs and have your student describe the action in the picture. Or you might encourage him to describe recent activities of his family, job, a television show, his childhood, or to tell about a local news item.

2) Write your student's words exactly as he speaks them, using carbon paper to make a duplicate copy. Use manuscript writing. While you do not change the student's words or grammatical construction, do use standard spelling. For example, "Me 'n dis dog" is written "Me and this dog."

3) Read the entire story to the student, carefully pointing to each individual word (left to right) as you read. Do not slide your pencil or finger pointer along; point to each word separately.

4) Re-read the first sentence.

5) Have your student read the first sentence. Encourage him by pointing out often that the words are his own. Immediately tell him any word he cannot recall so that he can read smoothly.

6) Student, tutor, or both of you together, select a meaningful word (or two or three, depending on content) from a sentence. Underline the word(s).

7) Write a word card (cut 3 x 5 cards into quarters) for each word

8) Have the student match the word card to the word in the sentence.

9) Mix the word cards. See if he can read them independently. If not, let him rematch them to the underlined words in his story.

10) Continue in this manner with another sentence. If the dictation was very short, you may go through several sentences or even the entire story. Be guided by your student's reaction. It is important at this point not to overburden him. Only 5 or 6 words should be given in a session until you are sure your student can handle more.

11) Have your student take his personally written story and his word cards home with him to practice (unless he does not wish to).

12) The tutor, from the carbon copy, now types two copies (double-spaced) for the student to read at the next session.

13) The tutor prepares a full set of word- and phrase-reading cards drawn from the story for future teaching.

14) The tutor prepares additional lessons on word decoding that can be taught from the dictated story content. Depending on the level of the student, other skills can also be taught with experience stories: writing, composition, alternate vocabulary are but a few.

The skills to be taught in follow-up lessons should be from the story content. Concentrate on only one skill at a time in beginning lessons. When your student shows that he is able to use the particular skill in other reading materials as well as in his experience story (that is, he demonstrates that he can generalize the skill), he is ready to move on to a new skill. Showing the student how successful he can be is a cornerstone of language experience. Therefore it is highly important to pace your student's skill work carefully so that he is consistently successful. This applies to students on all reading levels. Gearing the lessons to the individual student's ability and interests is what makes the experience method work.

After the experience story has been taught and your student can read it without errors, he might like to tape record it or read it to a selected audience --- other students, tutors, or a friend. If he can write, he might like to copy it in book form. If his writing skill is not well-developed, he may still like the book idea, but want a typed copy of the text with perhaps an illustration contributed by himself. Or, his contribution may be only to arrange his stories in order and staple on a cover. The point is that you should encourage any such activities since they emphasize individual worth and demonstrate a student's success to him and to others.

Tutor Preparation for an Experience Lesson

To prepare yourself for teaching an experience lesson, you will need practice as well as theory. On the following page is the sample

Sample Lesson Plan for Tutoring Session Using Language Experience Method

Goals	Materials	Procedures and Evaluation
To pronounce and use correctly in context 5 words from previous lesson	Student's cards with sight words: the on book table is	1. Shuffle cards 2. Present word and ask student what it is. 3. Ask student to use each word in sentence.
To listen and comprehend (at least 75% accurately) the story "A New Job for Nancy"	Book: On the Job, p. 9	1. Make sure student understands meanings of beautician and employment. 2. Read story to student. 3. Question student about story.
To dictate a short experience story for later skill work	Carbon paper Paper Ball point pen	1. If student needs a topic, refer to previous story on jobs; ask student to describe a job. 2. As student talks, record story on paper. 3. Read story to student. 4. Re-read first sentence. 5. Have student read first sentence; give help with unknown words. 6. Tutor and student select meaningful words in first sentence for study. Underline words and print on cards. 7. Have student match word card to sentence words. 8. Continue until lesson ends or until 5 or 6 words are given.

Sample Tutor Log Notes

Correctly identified and used the, book, table, is.
Needs more work with on. 80% accuracy.

Answered all comprehension questions right. Does not want to be a beautician as she would have to go out of town to school. Said she personally admired Nancy's ambition.

Uneasy at first; asked several questions about "how to talk." Her story became quite conversational and I had to ask her to speak more slowly for recording.

Next Lesson:

1. Vocabulary: nurse, dentist, assistant, figure, learn
2. Common word Elements: Use how from story and teach that ow element using different beginning consonants --- now, cow, wow, maybe allow.
3. Continue reading story.

Dictated Language Experience Story

I've always wanted to be a nurse or dentist's assistant. And so I figure if I learn how to read and get my G.E.D., I could go to school and maybe become a nurse or travel. I like to do a lot of different things that I couldn't do because I didn't know how and I couldn't read the direction or description or nothing. So I think this will help me.

Sample Follow-Up Lesson Using Language Experience Method

Goals	Materials	Procedures and Evaluation
To pronounce correctly five words from experience story and match them with typed version in story	1. Student word cards 2. Pencil 3. Typed copies of experience story	1. Have student match word cards to words in typed copy of story. 2. Have student read words independently. 3. Have student re-read sentences (give help when necessary).
To recognize the word how in the story and generalize sounds to similar words	1. Typed story 2. Three word cards printed ___ow 3. Small mirror	1. Teach how as follows: a) Point out word in story and use in student's sentence. b) Tell student to watch his mouth in mirror while he says how; have him repeat several times. c) Replace the h in how with the sounds of other consonants n, c, and w. Note: Student may point out that some words with similar spelling are sometimes (bow, row) or always (low, tow) pronounced differently than how. Be honest; acknowledge that this is true and the problem of language 'rules.' Sound patterns should be suggested as a good method to find a pronunciation that makes sense. Making sense is always the criterion for how a word is pronounced. d) Illustrate with mirror the pronunciations with the substituted consonants. e) Present words in context of phrase or sentence. f) Give word cards with the ___ow base for student to study.
To read with 75% accuracy first half of experience story.	Typed copy of story	Have student re-read first half of story (with help when needed), noting any errors.

lesson plan for a tutoring session in which the language experience method is incorporated. On the back of the lesson plan sheet you will find sample tutor log notes made on that lesson.

On the next page is the real language experience story dictated by a literacy student. (This is the experience story being used in our sample lesson.)

Finally, there is the sample of a follow-up lesson, based on the experience story, to be used in the next tutoring session.

Using these pages as guides, work through the following steps as a practice exercise to help you gain skill and confidence in using the language experience method:

1) Re-read preceding section entitled Basic Outline of Language Experience Method.

2) Have a co-worker dictate to you a short experience story so that you may practice transcribing.

3) Prepare a sample lesson for a student based on the transcribed story.

4) Evaluate your lesson in terms of skills to be developed, how appropriate those skills are to the student and to the story content, and how much lesson time might be needed for the skill training.

You will also find it helpful to refer to the lesson planning procedures and the sample lesson plans found in Instructional Concept Guide No. 3, "Student-Centered Tutoring: Using Initial Lesson Results to Set Future Goals," from the TUTOR SUPPORT LIBRARY. The language experience approach is included as a part of those sample lessons.

Using the Language Experience Approach in Different Settings

Using a student's dictation in the form of a "story" is only one application of the language experience method. Tutors should be flexible in the use of this teaching approach as in all other aspects of tutoring. If your student's needs would appear to be met by using a setting other than the typical story, then adjust the technique to fit a style appropriate to him. Following is a list of additional ways to use the language experience approach to acquire a sample of the student's own words for reading instruction:

1. Letters, personal or business, may be used. The student may dictate a letter to a friend or relative, to answer an advertisement, to inquire about a product, or state his opinion to his Congressman.

2. Short plays or dialogues are an excellent application of the experience approach. Encourage dramatizing a recent event or a personal conversation. (It might be the pro and con of a neighborhood problem, for example.) This activity can also be used effectively to promote group work or interaction between students.

3. Application forms may be used as the basis for a lesson. Ask the student to tell about himself and his family in detail.

4. The student might dictate a recipe, instructions on how to perform a task familiar to him (change a tire), or how to operate a machine he uses.

5. Everyday household activities such as changing the baby, washing clothes, and refinishing furniture can provide a student with an idea he can talk about.

6. The student might give character descriptions of members of his family or describe a special experience from his childhood.

7. Present an illustration to the student and encourage him to tell about what he thinks is happening in the picture.

8. Occasional visits to places of interest in the community may stimulate descriptions.

9. The student might take a reporter's role and write a news article or editorial on a topic of interest to him.

10. Read an open-ended play or story to the student. Encourage him to create a conclusion.

In short, any setting that puts words on paper can be used. Your student may originate ideas of his own. By encouraging him and being imaginative yourself, you can best gain the personal interest your student must have in order to achieve maximum success in learning to read through this method.

* * * * * * * * * *

Other materials you may wish to read concerning the language experience approach are listed below:

1. Ashton-Warner, Sylvia. Teacher. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.

   The story of how the author discovered and successfully used the language experience approach to teach Maori children in New Zealand how to read. A fascinating, personal account of teaching success with a sub-culture group.

2. Becker, John T. Language experience approach in a Job Corps reading lab. Journal of Reading, 1970, 13, 281-284, 319-321.

   A discussion of how the experience approach was used with young women in a Job Corps Center in West Virginia.

3. Lee, Doris M. and Allen, R. Van. Learning to Read Through Experience. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963.

   A convenient and easy-to-read paperback that describes the experience method and how to do it.

4. Stauffer, Russell G. The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.